Connally's guard recalls at least 3 bullet fragments

4/1/77

By EARL GOLZ

©1977, The Dallas Morning News

A state highway patrolman who guarded Gov. John Connally's room at Parkland Memorial Hospital in 1963 told The News Saturday he recalls turning over to an FBI agent more than three bullet fragments the Warren Commission asserted were removed from Connally's wounds after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Patrolman Charles W. Harbison's story is doubly significant when coupled with the recollection of Miss Audrey N. Bell, supervisor of the Parkland operating room, who earlier this week stated she was given four or five other fragments taken from Connally.

The two separate groups of fragments now make a total of at least eight fragments purportedly found in Connally from what the Warren Commission described as a "nearly whole bullet" that allegedly fell onto Connally's stretcher with no more than one or two grains missing.

House Assassinations Committee investigators say they believe the bullet, which supposedly struck Kennedy in the back and then passed through Connally's body, would have weighed too much if more than three fragments were removed.

Committee investigators already had interviewed Miss Bell and concluded her testimony, if proven true, could discredit "the very cornerstone and basis of the entire Warren Commission report." She had never been interviewed by the Warren Commission, which apparently had not heard of her story.

Harbison and Miss Bell said they didn't come forward sooner because they weren't that familiar with the Warren Report. Harbison, who came to The News with his story after reading about Miss Pell's account Friday, likewise was not quizzed by the Warren Commission.

The News on Saturday arranged for Miss Bell and Harbison to talk and exchange ideas on what could have happened on Nov. 22, 1963, and the days following.

Harbison said it was either Nov. 25 or 26 when he was out in the hall outside the recovery room at Parkland and hospital officials were moving Connally from it to a private room.

He said someone stepped out from the recovery room — possibly a physician — and "I had my hand cupped and he put them (fragments) in there and I in turn gave them to an FBI agent. I have no earthly idea who I gave them to. He was standing up there in the hall.

"But to my knowledge it was more than three fragments," Harbison said with assurance.

Miss Bell said she placed four or five bullet fragments in a "foreign body envelope" in the operating room where Connally was undergoing surgery on the day of the assassination, Nov. 22. She said she marked the envelope stating the fragments came from Connally's arm, "so it is conceivable that no one picked up the leg fragments until later.

"It's a mystery to me where these other fragments (Harbison's) came from," Miss Bell said. "It really is. I mean, where Mr. Harbison got his, particularly that much later."

She said the Harbison group of fragments may have been "just temporarily misplaced and they were given to him later. I got part of them and he got part of them. This is the only logical explanation I can see for it."

Harbison, who was one of the guards for Connally's hospital room for about one month after the assassination, said Miss Bell "told me that she put some in an envelope, but I wonder what happened to the ones they gave me."

Miss Bell said she gave the envelope to two federal agents on Nov. 22. One identified himself as a Secret Service agent and the other may have been an FBI agent, she said. Harbison, she thinks, "is sincere" after talking with him.

The Warren Report said the three doctors who attended Connally at the hospital "expressed independently their opinion that a single bullet had passed through his chest; tumbled through his wrist with very little exit velocity, leaving small metallic fragments from the rear portion of the bullet . " The bullet then punctured Connally's left thigh and fell out onto the stretcher, the report asserted.

"An X-ray of the governor's wrist showed very minute metallic fragments, and two or three of these fragments were removed from his wrist," the report stated.

Connally himself has questioned whether the same bullet that fir struck Kennedy in the back also w the one that caused all his wounds.